Magazine Feature Section

The Photoplay Forum

WHAT'S WHAT AND WHO'S WHO IN MOTION PICTURE WORLD

Letters from a Correspondence School Actor

By A. H. GIEBLER.

DEAR DAVE:

Well, Dave, I am a comic actor now, and I guess I'll be that from now on. At first I thought I'd always be a hero actor and never do any kind of acting but rescuing girls and maybe now and then some heavy acting, like I did in The Halfbreed's Hate, that I acted in last week. But the comedian actors get the most money and I've decided to be one like Chas. Chaplin. Chas. Chaplin gets about a dollar a minute for all the comic acting he does, and all he does is to kinda walk funny and things like that. I am almost as funny as he is now, and with a little more practice I will be a heap funnier, because the actors in this company that me and Lucy is working in all laughed themselves nearly sick at the way I acted in a picture I took part in at the movie actors' ball I went to, and if you can make an actor laugh you are

"I just left her standing kinda still and danced all around her."

going some, Dave, because they see so much acting all the time it doesn't seem funny to them, and, besides, they are afraid to laugh at some one else's acting, because they think that the director will think they are better than they are.

This comic picture I made a hit in is called Sapho's Soul Mate, and the fat girl I told you about—the one that takes care of the clothes and things the actors wear—she is in it, me and her are the stars, and I am supposed to be in love with her; she is "Sapho."

I tell you, Dave, this movie acting is not such a picnic as some folks think it is. That acting I did on the ship was hard, and that camel riding and walking was hard. The acting in The Halfbreed wasn't quite so hard, except when I get shot.

The director that told me how to act said:

"Don't fall all at once, just go half way down then roll over and die," and I just kinda set down and landed right on top of some cactus.

The director says: "Here, you are not doing a comic death scene; this is tragedy; there's nothing funny in it," and if you was to sit down on some of them cactuses, Dave, you would say it wasn't very funny, either. We had to make that scene over because the director says:

"You wiggled around like you was on top of a hot stove. That won't do."

You see, all the parts I have played in the pictures have been hard to do, and if you'd have to carry a fat girl upstairs like I did in this Sapho picture, you'd say that that wasn't any picnic, either, Dave.

The way they found out that I was such a good comic actor was when we went to the movie actors' ball. There is a ball or party going on all the time out here. Some of them are given in halls, and the public people can come and pay two, or maybe three dollars because they are all crazy to go to them balls and maybe get to dance with big actors like me and Strongheart and Robert Cardman or J. J. Murphy, who is an actor part of the time and calls himself John James Murgatroyd, and is a director part of the time and is J. J. Murphy.

I guess us movie actors could go to a ball or party at night and to an ice cream sociable in the afternoon, and to some kind of a club meeting in the morning every day of our lives if we didn't have to do a little acting now and then, because these folks out here are crazy to look at us actors, and when a church or lodge wants to get up a doin's of some kind to raise money to paint the church or get the preacher a new suit of clothes, all they do is to get some big movie actor to come, and the people will rush in and spend all their money just to look at the actor and say:

"It's a nice evening for the party, ain't it?" or something like that, and then they go away and say:

"Oh, yes, I know him. I was at a party with him the other night," and pull stuff like that.

But this ball wasn't a public ball; it was just for the actors in this company that me and Lucy is working in, and the actors of the Enterprise Moving Picture Company, that has a new studio, and asked us all to come over and have a dance. When we were all ready to go in the automobiles, Mr. Crossland says:

"Now one of us must take Flora."

No one ever wants to take her because she has been the fat girl in a circus, and J. J. Murphy says:

"Yes, it's a shame the way that girl is treated, and I think you ought to take her yourself, Fred, because you are married, and she won't think you are stuck on her, and your wife isn't here, and the other girls don't like to go with you because you are married."

But Mr. Crossland remembered that he had to go to the depot to tell some folks good-by, and J. J. Murphy says:

"Well, then, we'll draw lots. We'll put all of the girls' names in a hat, and whoever gets her name takes her to the ball," and they said I could draw first, and my piece of paper said Fatty on it and so I had to take her.

The automobile we went in was big enough to carry five people in the back part of it, but we had the back part all to ourselves because there wasn't room for anybody else. I told Lucy we could squeez up and make room for her, but she said she would rather walk; but she didn't walk, she went to the party with Strongheart in one of the other automobiles.

You know that I can dance pretty well, Dave, but the kind of dancing they do out here is not the kind I am used to. Some of it is just sort of walking around and some of it is whirling and trying to throw your pardner over your head. Of course, I couldn't lift a fat girl from a circus and swing her around like that. And they've got another rule, too. If you take a girl to a dance the first time, you can't dance with no other girl but her, and all of them had been to dances before with them girls, and could change partners and have a good time, but it wasn't stylish for me to do that, and I had to dance with Flora, the fat girl, all the time.

We tried to do one of them walking dances, but she was so heavy on her feet that she couldn't do that, either, so I just left her standing kinda still and danced all around her, and

"If you can make an actor laugh you are going some."

everybody else stopped dancing and began to laugh at us, and J. J. Murphy said:

"Tom, you'll be the death of me, yet."

Flora, she cried, and J. J. Murphy patted her on the back and says:

"Flora, your chance has come. If you and Tom will do that in the studio tomorrow, we will write some stuff around it and make a comedy out of it." and she dried up then and was the most pleased fat girl I ever saw.

Mr. Carleton, the director of the Enterprise studio, says:

"Why wait till tomorrow. Let's get it now. We'll make a burlesque Sapho ballroom scene," and they got out the big lights and rousted the camera man out, and me and Flora did all the funny things we could think of, and when we were going home in the automobile she said she had always wanted to be a movie actress, but she had no show on account of her shape, and all the closer she had ever got was to be a wardrobe keeper, and she was so glad I had done that funny dance and give her a chance to act in the movies that she felt just like putting her head on my shoulder and having a good cry.

But I told her that I had a girl that was named Mabel, and that she had better not do that because Mabel might hear of it and get mad, so she didn't.

I don't want no fat girl crying on my shoulder, would you, Dave?

Well, the next day we worked out the rest of that comic picture, and it sure was comic, Dave. The play is where me and a fat girl has been to a ball and she wants me to carry her upstairs.

I said to J. J. Murphy: "I can't carry her up no steps."

And he said:

"Not unless you are a freight elevator. We will make a dummy."

And the property man that makes the dummies, says:

"Look here, I can't make no dummy of her that will look human, and, besides, I ain't got enough stuff till I get another bale of hay."

Them stairs was just fake stairs. They went up to a platform, like the side of a house with wallpaper painted on it, only it is made out of canvas.

Strongheart said to me:

"Do you want to make a hit with Murphy?"

I said yes.

"Lug her upstairs, then," he said, "and save them the trouble of making a dummy."

And I said:

"I can do it all right. I carried a barrel of salt upstairs once when I worked in a grocery store."

He said:

"Go to it before Murph comes back," and I grabbed her and started up the steps, and I tell you it was some tugging, and she hollered and kicked, but I got her up there and set her down, and she was afraid to walk down the steps because they was shaky. They all hollered:

"Carry her down, Armand." But she said she would scratch my eyes out if I tried to carry her down them steps, and I said:

"I guess you are big enough to walk down yourself," and I left her up there.

When I got down I saw the property man coming, and he had made a dummy of her after all, and he took it up to the platform to compare it with her, and Flora forgot that the wall was not a sure enough wall, but just painted to look like the side of a house on canvas, and she leaned on it and it busted with her, and J. J. Murphy says: "My God, grab her!"

I thought it was the dummy coming down and I grabbed her, and she fell right on top of me and almost busted me in two, and everybody nearly laughed themselves sick, and it was all because I am such a good comic actor, and I guess I'll be getting as much as Chas. Chaplin, or maybe Sidney Chaplin, his brother, or Fatty Arbuckle, or some of them high-priced comedian actors.

Lucy had been acting kinda mad at me, but when we got through with that picture she says:

"Come on, Tom, and I'll buy your lunch, and it won't cost you no $5 this time."

"I don't let no girl buy things for me to eat," I said, "and, besides, I thought you was kinda miffed at me."

She said: "Did you get hurt when 'Sapho' fell on you?"

I said: "No, it nearly busted me in two, but it didn't hurt me, just jolted me a little. 'Sapho' wasn't hurt, either, just scared."

And Lucy says: "She must have fell on your head; it's soft, and it kept her from getting hurt."

"What right have you to call me any softhead?" I said

"Because you are a softhead to let that bunch of smart alecks at the studio play jokes on you," said Lucy. "I've just found out why you took 'Sapho' to the ball."

I said it was because I drawed her name out of a hat, but I wouldn't tell her, because it wasn't square to tell things like that, and she said:

"Well, you've got different ideas of squareness than the other men at the studio. They are laughing about it. I saw them pieces of paper, and there was Fatty written on all of them."

I'm going to get even with that bunch, Dave. You know me when I get started. Well, so long.

TOM.

LILLIAN LORRAINE is another actress who made a big hit on the regular stage and has "come over" to the movies, and registered just as effectively. This girl is the happy possessor of the three things that make for success and popularity on any stage, whether audible or silent. She has good looks, talent, and the rare knowledge of how to wear her clothes, combined with a still rarer knowledge of what kind of clothes to wear and when to wear them.

Miss Lorraine has only been in moving picture work for a short time, but to judge from the impression she has created she will climb high on the ladder of movie fame. She made her first appearance as a screen actress in the leading part of Neal of the Navy series, produced by the Balboa Company for the Pathe program.

Miss Lorraine has since appeared in other films, and the future will no doubt see her in many more, because no matter how popular an actress may become on the regular stage, she always finds a wider scope for her talents when she works before the camera. This, and the relief from travel and bad hotels, incidental to a regular stage life, usually keeps them in camera work when they once give it a try.

Miss Lorraine was born in San Francisco twenty-four years ago. She began her career as an actress when 4 years old, and, of course, her first part was that of "Little Eva" in Uncle Tom's Cabin. She has appeared in musical comedy and on the vaudeville stage, and is a consistent worker in all lines of dramatic endeavor. She has a most pleasant and magnetic personality, and makes friends wherever she goes.

As to Photo-Play Writing

L. M.—Your rejection slip that says, "Too conventional," and "Too weak," may mean several things. It may mean that it is simply the judgment of that particular editor. The next one might pounce upon the play with a cry of joy, and write you a check with a hand trembling with gratitude.

Then, again, it may mean that the man was right. The play may be too weak and too conventional. There are many such written, you know. Do not get discouraged at rejection slips. They mean but little. Of course, they mean that the company that sends your play trotting back to you with the slip does not want that play, but another company may want it.

We have sold plays to companies that had previously refused them. Once an editor said, in sending back a script: "Your technique is perfect." (How proud we were.) Then further along in the letter: "The play is not logical." (How sad we were.) And in two weeks another editor said: "This is fine, a big idea." And that play still languishes in the bottom drawer of our desk, unsold.

Read your play over, it is cold now, and will appeal to you differently. If you honestly think that it is not weak or conventional, don't let another kill your faith in it; send it out again. On the other hand, be honest with yourself if it is. Rewrite it, if you can strengthen it, and if you cannot, lay it away and get busy on another one. Then after a few weeks get the weak one out and see if you can't fix it up. That has been done many a time.

A. P. FEW wants to know if 185 words is long enough for a synopsis. If you can tell your story in 185 words, that is enough; and you are lucky, for most people are afflicted with long-windedness when it comes to writing synopses.

Here is the idea of the synopsis: All of the manuscripts reaching a studio are read by the scenario editor—an individual who must have rare discrimination, the memory of a bureau of information chief, a correct idea of dramatic values, and the patience of Job. This editor will pass on 100 manuscripts a day, but the synopsis is all he reads of most of them, because he can see from that whether the play is suited to his needs. This is the sole reason the synopsis is put at the head of your play—to keep the editor from wading through the whole manuscript.

When an editor finds a play that looks promising from the synopsis, it is laid aside for further consideration, is reread and then turned over to the director or to the head of the office for final judgment on it.

WORRIED—The advertisements of the North American Film Corporation state they want a suggestion for a sequel to The Diamond from the Sky, and the suggestion must be written out in the form of a synopsis, therefore the synopsis of just one chapter would not do. You have watched the present story, now take it up where it leaves off and build up another story from that. Carry the characters through a new set of adventures, and invent new characters if you need them.

The producers of The Diamond from the Sky, in their directions to contestants, say these things must be borne in mind: "What becomes of the diamond, What becomes of the child, What becomes of Blair Stanley." You will not need to indicate any number of scenes or chapters. Just write your story in outline; that is, as much as you can do in a thousand words, which is all that is allowed.

Make your directions as short and simple as possible, and get as much life and action into your story as you can. The film people will attend to all such things as putting it into chapters and scenario form. You are to furnish a suggestion that they can build up into another story, a sequel to the present story.

The Gigantic House that Pathe Built

IN all the history of business enterprises, there is no more remarkable growth than that shown by the moving-picture industry. It is today fifth in importance of all the great businesses of the United States.

When the gigantic industry is considered, when the number of people that are employed in the making and distribution and exhibition of films, and the number of theaters are counted, it seems hardly believable that twenty years ago there were no moving pictures, except a few of the cruder sort that were considered only as amusing novelties. No man thought that these crude toys would rise to the importance in our daily life that they have.

Twenty years ago the speaking stage was dominant; today it is decidedly of secondary consideration, because the magic strips of celluloid have given the people an amusement suited to their tastes and pocket books.

Today the man of family may take his entire flock and spend two hours looking at the pictures for less than half a dollar, if he is not the possessor of one of the old-fashioned large families.

The young blade intent on amusing himself and his sweetheart can take her to the neighborhood picture house and witness the work of the greatest stars of the stage for the same sum he would have spent for street car fare in the past.

The history of some of the great producers of motion pictures is most interesting. The house of Pathe Freres is a good example. This great business, which is international in its scope, with factories, studios, selling and distributing branches all over the world, was started twenty years ago by four brothers, who each contributed his entire fortune, at that time, of 2300 francs, less than $500 for each.

After three weeks two of the brothers, horrified at what looked like rashness, withdrew, taking their money with them.

The two brothers who remained, Charles and Emile, are said to draw a hundred thousand dollars each as salary per year, besides their great profits from the business.

In the early days, Charles Pathe had two of those primitive machines that the curious were allowed to look into for the charge of a penny. All that could be seen was a succession of tiny photographs tumbling over one another in the simulation of life action.

The original idea of the machine was Thomas A. Edison's, but Mr. Pathe was the first man in Europe to see the possibilities of great things in the germ that has grown into a gigantic business. He put his machines in a little store, and the interest exhibited by the people who dropped their coins in the machines showed him that it was a profitable thing to exploit.

There were no changes of program to the little machines, but one picture to each, and Pathe saw that to make the customer come back he would have to give them a change of program. Then and there was born the idea that grew into the modern film exchange. He purchased twenty machines, put them in twenty different stores and switched his pictures in weekly rotation.

From his profits he obtained Lumiere's motion-picture camera, then just completed, and began to take his own pictures, 10 or 15 feet at a time. His wife feeding chickens, a railroad train entering a station, a man running, sheep grazing; these were his early subjects. The idea of projecting these strips of film into the screen helped the infant industry tremendously.

Mr. Pathe took his fragmentary films in his pockets to London, Berlin, Rome, traveling third class because of his limited means, and sold them there. Gradually his films lengthened and his markets increased, but for some time he was his own camera man, shipping clerk, manufacturer, salesman and demonstrator.

One day the idea came to him that a story could be worked out upon the screen—that such film stories would possess a wider appeal than the bare facts of everyday life which he had been filming. He hired Max Linder, then an actor of limp purse, at $4 a day to work in comedies, and Louis J. Gasnier, a stage manager and play producer of Paris, to direct the taking of these pictures.

Here was born the photoplay of today, and from this beginning have come the Cabirias, the Births of a Nation, etc., with their universal appeal and gripping power.